

Commonwealth Experience: Working with Partners in Education

Video Presentation

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by

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Greetings to all of you from Beautiful British Columbia. As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning is an intergovernmental organization established by Commonwealth Heads of Government, when they met in Vancouver in 1987. COL helps Commonwealth governments and institutions to use various technologies to improve and expand learning for development, which is our motto.

COL may be across the Atlantic but as members of Team Commonwealth we are with you in spirit. And technology, which is our core business, enables us to reach you in this effortless manner.

The theme of this session, 'Working with Partners in Education' is fundamental to everything we do. For a small specialist organisation like COL, partnerships represent both a vital strategy and a firm commitment. As an organisation with a modest resource-base, COL's partners contribute both financially and intellectually to its programme outcomes and help leverage its impact.

For example the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth or VUSSC, a consortium of tertiary institutions in 31 Member States demonstrates south-south partnership and Commonwealth cooperation to promote quality tertiary education. Similarly, COL has catalyzed a partnership of institutions in 26 Member States to form the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association or COMOSA to enhance access to secondary schools.

COL's partners also represent relationships that help to define COL, where it works and what it stands for. These relationships are based on shared principles, specific common objectives and strategic linkages to particular fields of work and networks. For instance, COL has an MOU with

UNESCO under which it elaborates its joint work plans every three years. One concrete outcome of this partnership was the organization of the World OER Congress held in Paris in 2012 which resulted in the landmark OER Declaration. This partnership continues as we implement the recommendations of that Declaration.

COL's strategic plans are developed in close consultation with our various stakeholders. We have a network of Focal Points in all Commonwealth countries. The Focal Points have been nominated by Ministers of Education and their role is to advise us on their priorities in education and training. In addition, they are the ambassadors of COL in the field.

COL's partnerships range from close collaboration with multilateral organisations, national ministries, institutions, to community based organisations. All these partnerships are built on the core values of human rights, empathy, gender equality, democratic governance and participatory development. Let me share three lessons that we at COL have learnt from our years of experience in working with partners.

One, partnerships can only work on a win-win framework for all. In COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative, three partners play a key role: the farming community, the banks and COL. The community is empowered through COL's learning programme and is able to negotiate effectively with banks and markets. The banks are able to fulfil their mandate of providing credit to farmers and are able to achieve a very high rate of loan repayments. COL develops tried and tested models of 'learning for development', which it then replicates in other contexts. So everyone stands to gain in one form or another.

Two, partnerships have to be nurtured over the long-term through respect and understanding. Although specific collaborations may be operationalised in short-term periods, we need to be prepared for the long haul. We look at partnerships beyond contractual terms and see them as an ongoing relationship to achieve our common goals of bringing quality education for all. Our partnership with the National Teachers Institute, Kaduna, Nigeria has remained stable through ups and downs over the years.

Three, maintain effective communications with partners using all channels necessary. Partnerships are about people, their values and their behaviours and its important to like the people we work with.

With those few words, let me assure you that we at the Commonwealth of Learning will continue to welcome all opportunities to work with Team Commonwealth and beyond.